

Kentucky Self-Assessment Continuous Improvement Monitoring Process

Preface

The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) requires each state to provide early intervention services to infants and toddlers with disabilities and their families, and a free appropriate public education to children and youth with disabilities. The United States Department of Education Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP) is responsible for monitoring state and local efforts in the provision of these services. The process by which impact and effectiveness are determined is referred to as the Continuous Improvement Monitoring Process (CIMP). It reflects a comprehensive approach to overseeing a state's ability to implement IDEA.

As part of this federal Continuous Improvement Monitoring Process, Kentucky was selected by OSEP in the spring of 2001 to conduct a state-wide Self-Assessment. This document describes Kentucky's program administration, self-assessment process and its findings.

Executive Summary

OVERVIEW OF IDEA in KENTUCKY

Part C: Infants and toddlers from birth to age three

First Steps is Kentucky's Early Intervention System (KEIS) that serves children from birth to age 3 who have fallen significantly behind developmental norms in one or more skill areas or have a physical or mental condition that has a high probability of resulting in a developmental delay. First Steps is a state-wide, comprehensive, coordinated system of community-based, family-centered early intervention services for young children and their families with a vision of maximizing the potential of infants and toddlers and enhancing the capacity of the family to meet the needs of their children. The Cabinet for Health Services is the lead agency for Part C of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act and has obligations to exercise oversight in the administration of services to infants and toddlers. This interdisciplinary program brings together education, health, and social services to meet the special needs of children and their families.

Seven regional Parent and Professional Consultant teams throughout fifteen Area Development Districts in the state, provide training and technical assistance to parents, service providers and Points of Entry. These Points of Entry in each of the districts identify infants and toddlers with developmental delays and provide intake into early intervention services through a toll-free number.

A Governor appointed state council of 25 members called the Kentucky Early Intervention System-Interagency Coordinating Council (KEIS-ICC) provides advice and assistance to the Cabinet for Health Services in carrying out its responsibilities. Local coordinating committees, called District Early Intervention Committees (DEICs) are located in each of the 15 districts. They advise and assist the cabinet and the KEIS-ICC in the development, implementation and monitoring of First Steps and facilitate interagency coordination. Parents and service providers are represented on both the KEIS-ICC and DEIC.

The First Steps program is expected to complete a merger with the Commission for Children with Special Health Care Needs by spring 2002. This presents an opportunity to strengthen and support services to children and families with special developmental, educational and health needs. The merger supports the Governor's goal of strengthening families and is consistent with the vision for early childhood programs. The Cabinet for Health Services will remain as the lead agency.

Part B: Children from ages three through twenty-one

The Kentucky Department of Education, as the State Education Agency for Part B of the Individual with Disabilities Education Act, ensures statewide compliance with all federal and state mandates governing the provision of special education and related services. Within the Kentucky Department of Education, the Division for Exceptional Children Services consists of two branches. The Administration and Accountability Branch works with the Funding of Special Education Programs; the Continuous Improvement and Monitoring Process; the Kentucky Special Education Cooperative Network; Special Education Data Collection; the Comprehensive System of Personnel Development; the State Improvement Grant; Waivers, Emergency and Probationary Teacher Issues; and various Memorandums of Agreement. The Program Services Branch has a mission to facilitate systems change in the delivery of best educational practices at the state, regional and local level through Branch leadership, technical assistance, interagency collaboration and programmatic and professional development. Other technical supports for service delivery under the direction of the Division for Exceptional Children Services include the following.

Regional Exceptional Children Consultants: Located in each of the state's Regional Service Centers, the consultants work under the direction of the Division of Exceptional Children Services. They provide technical assistance, program design and development and professional development for local school districts.

Special Education Mentor Program: Special education mentors provide assistance to school districts identified by the Division of Exceptional Children Services. The mentors assist districts by providing technical assistance, professional development and program design in targeted areas of need.

Kentucky Special Education Cooperative Network: The network consists of eleven Special Education Cooperatives located across the state. The Special Education Cooperatives are aligned with the eight Regional Services Centers with each region having as many as two cooperatives. All 176 local school districts and the Kentucky Schools for the Blind and Deaf are members of a special education cooperative. Funding is provided using federal dollars awarded to Kentucky under Part B, Section 611, of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act Amendments of 1997. The Special Education Cooperative Network is intended to assist local school districts in meeting the needs of its member districts. Services range from technical assistance, trainings, professional development, specialized services, research, and other needs identified by member districts and the Kentucky Department of Education.

Kentucky was awarded a State Improvement Grant under Part D of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act. The purpose of Kentucky's project, Improving Consumers' Access to Educational Reform Utilizing a Systems Approach, was designed to improve learning results for Kentucky's children and youth with disabilities. To accomplish this purpose, the Division of Exceptional Children Services of Kentucky's Department of Education developed a unified and coherent plan combining the efforts of regular and special educators, local and state administrators, related services and paraprofessionals, staff of institutes of higher education and post-secondary programs, and, most importantly, students with disabilities and their families. The project focuses on three major performance goals: Education, Transition, and Early Intervention.

The Division of Exceptional Children Services and the First Steps program work collaboratively in areas of child find, personnel development, and transition of children at age three.

SUMMARY OF THE SELF-ASSESSMENT PROCESS

The Kentucky Department of Education, Division of Exceptional Children Services and the Cabinet for Health Services, First Steps program were notified that Kentucky had been selected to begin the Continuous Improvement Monitoring Process. In late December 2000 the Part B Director and the Part C Coordinator met, discussed logistics and determined to do a combined Self-Assessment. It was agreed that the Mid-South Regional Resource Center (MSRRC) would provide facilitation and assistance. In March 2001, several members of the administrative staff of the lead agencies met to design the process that would be followed. A Core Team (See Appendix A) was established and began weekly meetings to plan and carry out activities necessary to conduct a statewide self-assessment and issue a report. This Core Team was comprised of Part B and Part C state staff. Using a variety of resources, the Core Team developed a format for the indicator analysis.

In April 2001, consultants from MSRRC trained the staff of the Division of Exceptional Children Services and the First Steps Early Intervention Services. This training was designed to provide an overview of the continuous improvement monitoring process and an understanding of the expectations and timelines for the first phase. A staff liaison was assigned to each of the cluster areas. (See Appendix A) The staff liaisons were to be available at each Steering Committee and Cluster Group meeting to clarify issues, identify data sources, compile data, document conclusions, and prepare data folders for each indicator. The staff liaison team attended an Office of Special Education Programs sponsored Self-Assessment Institute held in July to gain further guidance in conducting the Self-Assessment process.

In Kentucky, one of the distinguishing features of the monitoring process was the establishment of a joint Part B/ Part C Steering Committee with broad representation from stakeholders in early intervention, special education and general education across the state. The Steering Committee was created to conduct the self-assessment and to begin to identify potential improvement strategies for the state's future improvement.

The State Advisory Panel for Exceptional Children along with members from the Kentucky Early Intervention System Interagency Coordinating Council and several other program partners would fulfill the state Steering Committee's responsibilities. Personal invitations were extended via mail to prospective members. Forty-eight individuals agreed to serve as members of the Steering Committee. A complete listing of Steering Committee members is provided in Appendix A.

The Steering Committee included representation from:

- Parents of infants, toddlers, children and youth with disabilities
- Special Education staff of local school districts
- General Education staff of local school districts
- Service providers of local infant and toddler programs
- State Advisory Panel for Exceptional Children
- Kentucky Early Intervention System-Interagency Coordinating Council
- Advocacy organizations
- Institutes of higher education
- Individuals with disabilities
- Parent Resource Centers
- Department of Juvenile Justice
- Adult correctional facilities
- Special Education administrators
- General Education administrators
- Private School administrators
- Vocational Rehabilitation programs

- Career/Technical Education programs
- Special projects representatives
- Child care providers
- Part C and B Lead Agency staff

An effort was made to establish a Steering Committee that was representative of the demographics and geographical regions of the state. The 2000 U.S. Census Data for the State of Kentucky indicated that minorities comprise 9.9% of Kentucky's population. Approximately 7.7% reported their race as African-American and 1.5% of the population reported as being of Hispanic origin. A survey completed of the Steering Committee members revealed that 12.5% of the committee membership are minorities. About 8.3% reported race as African-American, 2% reported as being of Hispanic origin. In addition, 34% of the membership were persons with disabilities or parents of individuals with disabilities. The Steering Committee membership was representative of all eight of the educational regions and all fifteen of the early intervention Area Development Districts.

The initial meeting of Kentucky's CIMP Steering Committee was held in April 2001. Staff from the Mid-South Regional Resource Center facilitated the orientation and organizational tasks related to the process. From that meeting the design for the project was finalized. The Steering Committee formed work groups in order to address each of the eight federal cluster areas. Each Steering Committee member was an active member of a Cluster Group.

The Cluster Groups were

- General Supervision (Part B and Part C)
- Public Awareness and Child Find (Part C)
- Family-Centered Services (Part C)
- Early Intervention Services in Natural Environments (Part C)
- Early Childhood Transition (Part C)
- Parent Involvement (Part B)
- FAPE in the Least Restrictive Environment (Part B)
- Secondary Transition (Part B)

The two state agencies empowered the Steering Committee to act independently of the departments' opinions and to reach conclusions based on the members' collective efforts. The results contained in this report are purposefully reflective of the stakeholders' judgments of the current status of early intervention and special education services in the Commonwealth of Kentucky.

During the summer and fall (see Appendix B) the self-assessment process proceeded through a series of activities, culminating in December 2001 with the submission of the report to OSEP. Steering Committee members, as members of the Cluster Groups, met monthly to review, analyze and interpret data and draw conclusions. The Steering Committee then met as a whole to reach consensus of

the Cluster Group's conclusions. Many of the Cluster Groups held additional meetings to complete their work.

Data Review Process

At the first Steering Committee meeting each member was given copies of available federal and state data sources. Cluster Group members were asked to identify and make available any additional data sources to which they had access. The Cluster Groups reviewed and analyzed the data relevant to each federal indicator. Technical assistance was available to assist the Cluster Groups in the understanding and use of the data. Emphasis was placed on the use of data to reach conclusions. Frequent reminders were given in what constituted reliable data. Cluster Groups then began the process of determining whether data gathered for the indicators were shown to be a strength or concern.

Focus Groups and Public Input

During the self-assessment process, additional sources of data were collected to assist in validating the results found by the Steering Committee. The First Steps program and the Division for Exceptional Children Services collaborated to conduct ten Focus Groups throughout the state. (See Appendix C).

In addition to the Focus Groups, parent input was solicited and widely advertised. The Staff Liaison Team developed questions for discussion based on OSEP guidelines for public input. The questions were accessible on the web sites of the Kentucky Department of Education and First Steps. Individuals were asked to submit written comments if they were unable to attend a Focus Group.

In late August and early September 2001, the Focus Groups were held throughout the state. Attendees of the Focus Groups were divided into Part B or Part C groups. Letters of invitation, which included copies of the discussion questions, were issued to parents, students, service providers, administrative personnel, representatives of higher education and other stakeholders. For Part B, these invitees were identified by the Special Education Cooperative Network. For Part C, the First Steps program conducted a random sampling to select parents and service providers. For stakeholder groups, First Steps requested that local districts identify participants. Both Part B and Part C were encouraged to identify individuals who would provide a candid opinion of how special education and early intervention services are provided in the Commonwealth.

A technical assistant utilizing the same questions for each group and site moderated each Focus Group. National Early Childhood Technical Assistance System provided a facilitator for the Part C groups and Mid-South Regional Resource Center provided the facilitators for the Part B groups. All verbatim comments were recorded and compiled. The Cluster Groups and Steering Committee used the data to validate their findings.

There were 281 individuals in attendance at the Focus Groups. Over 900 were invited. Parents made up approximately 16% of the participant groups; 42% were program administrators and 35% were service providers, teachers and other stakeholders. Representatives from higher education and students comprised the remaining 7%. Part B received 44 parent responses through the KDE web page and individual comments. Part C received 17 written responses from parents and providers.

Consensus Process

At each Steering Committee meeting, the Cluster Groups presented their findings both verbally and in writing to the full committee. The members were given an opportunity to have input into the findings or to question the validity of the work. The Cluster Group members could then clarify or revise their findings as needed. The last three Steering Committee meetings were formal presentations of the work of the Cluster Groups. The Steering Committee, through a systematic consensus process, reviewed all of the findings and agreed they could publicly support each finding. All conclusions contained in this report were agreed upon by the Steering Committee.

Key Findings of Kentucky's Self-Assessment Process

Areas of Strength

The results of the self-assessment process revealed areas of strength with Kentucky's Part B and Part C systems. The Steering Committee did not identify any areas of non-compliance. Across all the cluster areas major themes emerged.

The first theme relates to an emphasis Kentucky's programs place on family involvement. Family Centeredness is the key philosophy driving the Part C service delivery system. This focus encourages family involvement in the early intervention programs through the transition into the Part B programs and throughout the child's movement in the school program to transition to post-secondary activities. Data collection results indicate that 84% of parents surveyed believe they have been effective in participating in their child's educational program. Families are encouraged to serve on many local and state councils, such as the Interagency Coordinating Council and the State Advisory Panel.

The second theme relates to Kentucky's school reform efforts. The reform initiatives are based on a commitment to being inclusive of all children. The reform is comprehensive and holds students, educators, schools and districts

accountable for student performance. The Commonwealth Accountability Testing System (CATS) includes all children and was in effect prior to the federal mandate. Less than 1% of Kentucky's students participate in alternative assessments. Kentucky is committed to bringing all of the energy and resources of the Department and many partners together to help all Kentucky schools reach or exceed the state performance goal by 2014 through:

- High Student Performance
- High Quality Teaching and Administration
- Strong and Supportive Environment for Each School and Every Child

The third theme reflects the strength of the policies and procedures that are in place in both Part B and Part C programs. These policies and procedures with procedural safeguards help to ensure that all Kentucky children have a right to educational services designed to meet their unique needs.

Summary of Other Significant Areas of Strength

- Monitoring systems are in place to measure compliance as well as positive outcomes for students and children with disabilities in both Part B and Part C.
- Part B and Part C systems have been effective in providing training to parents and a broad range of personnel on behalf of children with disabilities. Ample staff is available to provide training.
- A system is in place for early intervention services that includes a specialized intake process, state caseload requirement and Point of Entry staff funding formula to ensure that families have access to an adequate number of services coordinators to ensure timely services.
- The state special education regulations foster commitment to a free appropriate public education in the least restrictive environment. Eligible children and youth with disabilities, including those in local and state juvenile correctional facilities, are receiving services at a rate comparable to the national average.
- The use of interagency agreements as a method for service coordination is increasing. School districts offer community-based job coach services through a collaborative funding agreement between the Kentucky Department of Education, the local school district and the Department of Vocational Rehabilitation.
- A variety of strategies have been used to increase the numbers of qualified personnel.

Areas for Improvement

While progress has been made in all areas of the Part B and Part C systems, there are some aspects of the system that still need to be improved. One of the prominent themes that surfaced was the need to improve data collection and the use of subsequent data. Suggestions for improvement strategies included:

- aligning data collection across projects, agencies, and geographical areas;
- increasing relevant data collection and analysis; and
- encouraging the use of data-based strategies throughout the delivery system.

Summary of Other Significant Areas Needing Improvement

- Part B does not have a systematic method of compiling and analyzing the results of complaint investigations, hearings, appeal board hearings, and mediation; therefore, systemic issues are not identified or remediated. Part C does not have a systematic method of compiling and analyzing the available Central Billing and Information System (CBIS) data to identify statewide issues.
- There is not adequate follow-up to trainings to verify adherence and understanding of Policies and Procedures, even though the structure is in place. Some Part B parents say they still don't understand the special education process.
- Kentucky needs to collect data in a consistent manner and utilize data in improvement for child find in rural areas, ensuring timely referrals, identifying multi-language needs and distribution of Public Awareness materials. There is no systematic data available to confirm that all eligible children are receiving services by their third birthday.
- Initial Service Coordinator caseloads for Part C are increasing annually and the formula for setting caseloads is a general guideline only and not clearly stated or followed.
- Data from annual child count reports, state ethnicity data, and focus group information indicate there is an over-representation of African-Americans in special education, especially in the categories of Mild Mental Disabilities, Developmental Disabilities, and Emotional Behavior Disabilities.
- The annual data report indicates that only 60% of youth graduate annually versus the national average of 64%. The dropout rate is 43% compared to the national average of 29%.
- The number of personnel who hold a teaching license with emergency endorsement in the area assigned has increased over the past few years. Many training activities are implemented; more preservice and professional development opportunities are needed to increase the number of fully qualified personnel.
- Although First Step providers must be credentialed, it is possible for providers to be fully licensed or credentialed without prior experiences or background in early childhood.

Next Step Recommendations

Next Step improvement strategies were recommended by the Steering Committee in order to address the areas of concern raised by the committee. A summary of the recommendations includes the following:

- Develop and implement a system to compile and analyze information from complaints, mediations, and hearings and ensure that the information gathered is utilized in all aspects of the system including training and technical assistance resources and identifying statewide issues.
- Identify and target rural areas for Public Awareness and Child Find activities.
- Offer specific exit options on the CBIS exit form and follow-up with a parent survey three months after the child turns three.
- Clearly define Initial Service Coordinator caseload size requirements and develop a mechanism for monitoring.
- The Kentucky Department of Education should identify districts whose disaggregated data shows a higher percentage of minority students in special education than would be expected based on their total minority population.
- Increase graduation rates and reduce dropout rates by including plans to address the needs of students with disabilities in the “Drop-Out Tool Kit” being developed by the Kentucky Department of Education.
- Continue the Kentucky Department of Education’s initiative on recruitment and retention of teachers in shortage areas and work with the General Assembly to improve salaries and provide incentives to retain teachers.
- Develop and require early childhood continuing education for all providers.

The complete finding of the Cluster Groups and the consensus conclusions and recommended improvement strategies of the Steering Committee are provided in the remaining sections of this report.

For further information about the self-assessment process or the future phases of the federal monitoring process, please contact Mike Armstrong, Director, Division of Exceptional Children Services, at 502-564-4970 or Germaine O’Connell, Part C Coordinator, at 859-252-3170.